

Moose Factory Journal March 2004

Thursday, 4 March 2004

I got back from Waswanipi last month and promptly got sick -- as did many of my fellow travelers. I'm only beginning to come out from under my rock this week.

Friday, 26 March 2004

I'm 62, today. And, yes, this may be the shortest posting of The Journal yet. Just too many distractions over the past few weeks for me to think very much.

We just concluded another conference. Last month The Great Chapter meeting for the James Bay Deanery was at Waswanipi. This last weekend the Diocese of Moosonee did a Stewardship Conference here at Moose Factory. There were about 80 of us milling around -- and planning for the future. I seem to be back on my feet much faster after this weekend than the previous (big) weekend.

And it is getting warmer. Yesterday we got some heat -- the first of the Spring. Temps hit 45* -- same as Bangor, Maine for that day. A LOT of snow melted. Today, we are at a more conservative 9*.

I drove the ice highway -- between Moosonee and Moose Factory -- last Monday (March22). The road was in fine shape, even though we had had a warm day several days before. The heat from the sun penetrates now. And the air temperature has to stay well below freezing, or there will be melting. The road over The River has plenty of ice under it still. The danger -- or inconvenience -- now is the possibility of getting stuck in the slush on top of the road. I do not want to get stuck out there. I think I've made my last trip over the ice for the year.

An Elder told me yesterday that all the snow on The Island has to melt before The River starts to break up. We have much more snow on The Island this year than last year. While it was nice to see everything just melting away, the Elder reminded me that we don't want everything to melt all at once. In that case, The Island would be flooded out. It's happened before.

Tuesday, 30 March 2004

The temperature was up into the high 40's yesterday. School buses still ran between Moosonee and Moose Factory. But they may not finish the week. We could be using choppers before April 1.

River Roulette

There's a game, I'm told, that gets played in the Spring. About this time someone puts a tree out on the ice -- a tree big enough so that you can see it from the shore. Then everybody buys a ticket. On each ticket is written a precise day, date, and time. Eventually the tree will move -- when breakup starts. The ticket with the closest guess wins.

Movies

Last week, and ending this past Sunday, we were treated to a movie festival over at the High School on the Reserve. The films were all by and about First Nation People. Some were documentaries. At least one was a cartoon. Although I didn't see any, I think some were full length feature films. Sadly not a lot of people went. Maybe more would watch if the films were displayed on the local channels. The thawing and freezing of the past several days have made the roads tough to walk and tough to drive.

One of the films dealt with the referendum of about a year ago -- whereby the villages on the East Coast approved (barely) the latest Quebec Hydro project that includes the diversion of the

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Rupert River. (Evidently another piece of that project -- the damming of the upper Eastmain and the creation of a reservoir -- was never seriously disputed.) I think the point of the film was that the vote effectively split The Cree right down the middle. On the one hand there were those who advocated for development: jobs, training, education -- modernization. These were the folks who carried the day. On the other hand, however, there were those who saw further invasion into their ancestral lands. And with the loss of those lands there would be the loss of the culture and of the way of life. The same feelings I had written from in my piece on Conglomerate Gorge in the Eastmain Journal (in 1973) came up once more. It was *deja vu* all over again.

I suspect that the selection of films for this festival makes a very good list. here they are:

Albert's Reunion

Director: Ernest Webb

CBC North Maaumuitau, 2003, 11 min 13 sec (in Cree with English subtitles).

Athlii Gwaii: The Line at Lyell

Director: Marianne Jones (Haida)

Producer: Jeff Bear (Maliseet), Raven and Eagles Productions, Produced in association with Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, 2003, 47 min (in English and Haida with English subtitles) ***I saw this one, excellent study of people defending their islands against timber extraction.

Baseball Bats for Christmas

Director: Jeff Dom (Ojibway)

CBC Television, 2003, 11 min.

Blood River

Director: Kent Monkman (Cree)

Producer: Gisele Gordon, Urban nation, 2000, 23 min.

Christmas at Wapos Bay

Director: Dennis Jackson (Cree)

Dark Thunder Productions, 2002, 48 min (In Cree with English subtitles).

Cowboys and Indian: The J. J. Harper Story

Director: Norma Bailey

Producers: Eric Jordan and Jeremy Torrie (Ojibwe), High Definition Pictures, Produced in association with Aboriginal Peoples Television Network and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2003, 89 min.

Daba Iyiyuu ("Absolutely Cree") Episode 6

Director: Neil Diamond (Cree)

Rezolution Pictures International, 2003, 24 min, (Cree with English subtitles).

***This is another that I saw. The title of this episode is: 'Charlie Makes a Drum.' Charlie makes a traditional drum -- from the traditional materials in the traditional way. What makes this film so outstanding -- besides the subject -- is the authenticity of perspective. It runs only 24 minutes, but it is a superb introduction to the culture.

Donna's Story

Director: Doug Cuthand (Cree)

National Film Board of Canada, 2002, 51 min.

Dreamkeeper

Director: Steve Barron

Hallmark Entertainment, 2003, 90 min.

Finding My Talk

Director: Paul M. Rickard (Cree)

Achimist Films in co-production with Nutaaq Media, Inc. in association with the Kativik School Board, Waewatay Native Communications Society and the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, 48 min, 2000.

For John

Director: Dale Montour

National Film Board of Canada, 2003, 54 min.

From Cherry English

Director: Jeffrey Barnaby (Mi'kmaq)

Executive Producers: Paul M. Rickard (Cree) and George Hargrave, Nutaaq media, Inc. 2004, 10 min.

How the Fiddle Flows

Director: Gregory Coyes (Metis)

National Film Board of Canada and Streaming Fiddles Media, 2002, 48 min.

Gathering of Our People 2003

Director: Victor Linklater (Cree)

Minoshen Productions and Moose Cree First Nation, 48 min, 2003.

If the Weather Permits

Director: Elisapie Isaac (Inuk)

Produced by: the National Film Board of Canada, 2003, 28 min. (English and Inuktitut with English subtitles).

In Shadow

Director: Shirley Cheechoo (Cree)

Canadoian Film Centre, 2003, 19 min.

Just One More River

Directors: Neil Diamond (Cree) and Tracey Deer (Mohawk)

Rezolution Pictures, 2003, 75 min. ***This is the one I saw; required for all canoers and river rats. Excellent documentary on the breakdown of consensus regarding development.

Only the Devil Speaks Cree

Director: Pamela Matthews (Cree)

Thunderbird Productions, 2002, 33 min.

Our Nationhood

Director: Alanis Obomsawin (Abenaki)

National Film Board of Canada (2003), 96 min.

Stories from The Seventh Fire: Summer

Director: Gregory Coyes (Metis) and Tantoo Cardinal (Metis), 2002, 24 min.

Pikutiskwaau (Mother Earth)

Director: Shirley Cheechoo (Cree)

Produced by the Cree School Board of James Bay, 2002, 52 min (in English and Cree with English subtitles).

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Wawatay Kids TV

Director: Michael Dube

Wawatay Native Communications Society, 2003, 24 min.

The only contact information distributed at the festival was for Paul Rickard:

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Ivy Hepton

Ivy Hepton lived in the North throughout the fifties and sixties. For several of those years she lived in Fort George (now Chisasibi) and Moose Factory -- where she worked at The Hospital. She had a simple camera and took several slides. I scanned 384 of them. And they are now posted. Many were not in very good focus -- even when she took them. And several of the slides are now seriously deteriorated. But they show the people and the times. And that makes them significant. I've been circulating some of the group shots; somebody always gets recognized.

To get into Ivy's slide collection, go to St Thomas' Home Page.... Check out the 'Special Projects' Section. Her slides will be noted there. As soon as you hit that link, you'll be asked for a password. Type in lowercase letters: moose That should open the section right up for you. (Sorry for the formality. But, only if you're reading The Journal, do you get to see the pictures...)

These are pictures of a number of studies. Her pictures of the kids are what grab my attention. Remember that some of those kids are very much alive and well today. And some of them make it their business to direct my life in proper fashion. Sometimes the expressions are happy. And sometimes they are sad. This is the world of the Residential School and the Tuberculosis Hospital.

Wednesday, 31 March 2004

The Choppers coming!

I heard my first one this morning. It was landing at the hospital. I haven't heard any others -- yet. Tomorrow, however, is a new day -- and a new month. There will be choppers in April.

Usually the school buses are on the ice highway across The River all the way through March. Being the conservative sort they are, school buses are off the ice by April. Other vehicles may come and go across the ice several weeks in to April -- but not the school buses.

This year, however, the buses quit last Monday. (High School students who live on The Island but who do not live on The Reserve (on The Island) go to High School in Moosonee. Yesterday they had no school. The buses stayed off the ice. Reportedly the water was coming up into the bus itself on Monday. And the kids were getting wet feet and ankles -- and/or having water fights.

The ice is still thick. There was an oil truck making deliveries yesterday -- topping off TJ's GazBar's tanks. The locals know the ice well enough to be able to walk across it safely up to an hour or so before it gets dangerous -- or dangerous for them. One elderly gentleman pushed his

luck a little a year or so ago -- and had to be plucked from the (moving) ice by chopper.

At other communities the break-up can be more sudden -- and less forgiving. When I went through Attawapiskat years ago there was the story of a school teacher who had ventured out on to the ice in the spring. At that precise moment breakup occurred. There, that year, it took all of half an hour. The teacher and the ice upon which he stood were never seen again.